

Department of Human Services

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Ricky Holland's dad pleads guilty to son's death, implicates wife

By CHRIS CHRISTOFF
FREE PRESS STAFF WRITER

September 5, 2006

LANSING - Tim Holland pleaded guilty Tuesday to the murder of his adopted son, Ricky in July 2005 in a dramatic turn in a case in which Holland's wife, Lisa, also is charged in their son's death.

Tim Holland told Ingham County Circuit Judge Paula Manderfield that his wife had struck Ricky and overmedicated him and that before the boy died "he acted like a zombie."

At times sobbing, Tim Holland described living conditions for Ricky, then 7, "like a concentration camp" in which his mother struck him with objects including a tack hammer, regularly tie him in restraints and made him stand in one spot until he soiled himself.



Ricky Holland (Lansing Police Department)

Tim Holland said he eventually led authorities to his son's body because he feared his wife could do the same to their two other younger children. The boy's death and disappearance resulted in a manhunt in the Williamston community where the family lived.

Ingham County Prosecutor Stuart Dunnings III said that Tim Holland, who pleaded guilty to second degree murder, "aided and abetted Ricky's death." Lisa Holland is charged with first degree murder. Her attorney, Mike Nichols, said Tim Holland's testimony was substantially different than what he has said previously.

"It absolutely changes the case. A lot of that stuff I've never heard before," Nichols said.

As part of his plea agreement with prosecutors, Tim Holland agreed to testify against his wife.

Sentencing for Tim Holland is scheduled for Nov. 1.

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Tim Holland pleads guilty to second-degree murder in Ricky death

Midday update

Published September 5, 2006

By Stacey Range
Lansing State Journal

Tim Holland pleaded guilty this morning to second degree murder in the death of his 7-year-old adopted son, Ricky.

Under the agreement presented in Ingham County Circuit Court, Tim Holland will testify against his wife, Lisa, whose homicide trial is slated to start on Monday.

The Williamston couple first reported their son missing in July 2005; his body was later found in a remote area near Dansville.

Sentencing for Tim Holland was set for Nov. 1.

Get additional updates at LSJ.com and in Wednesday's Lansing State Journal.



Adoptive father pleads guilty in Ricky Holland case

9/5/2006, 1:14 p.m. ET

The Associated Press

LANSING, Mich. (AP) — The adoptive father of Ricky Holland pleaded guilty Tuesday to second-degree murder in the 7-year-old's death.

Under the agreement, Tim Holland will testify against his wife, Lisa, whose trial on first-degree murder charges is to start Monday, the Lansing State Journal reported on its Web site.

Tim Holland "aided and abetted" in Ricky's death, according to Ingham County Prosecutor Stuart Dunnings III. Mike Nichols, Lisa Holland's attorney, told the Detroit Free Press that Tim Holland's testimony was substantially different from what he has said previously.

Tim Holland testified Tuesday that his wife had struck Ricky and overmedicated him and that before the boy died "he acted like a zombie."

The Hollands told police when Ricky disappeared in July 2005 that they believed he had run away from their Williamston home, sparking a massive search. In January, Tim Holland led authorities to Ricky's body in a wooded area in rural Ingham County.

Tim Holland is to be sentenced on Nov. 1.

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Published September 1, 2006

[From the Lansing State Journal]

Local news briefs

Court won't delay Lisa Holland trial

The state Court of Appeals on Thursday denied a prosecution request to delay Lisa Holland's trial, meaning jury selection will begin Sept. 11 as planned.

Lisa and Tim Holland of Williamston are charged with murder and child abuse in the death of their 7-year-old adopted son, Ricky.

Prosecutors had filed a motion to stay Lisa Holland's trial so they could appeal a judge's decision to suppress part of her Jan. 26 interview with detectives, during which she said her husband might have strangled or suffocated Ricky.

Tim Holland's trial is set for Jan. 22, 2007.

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State takes custody of Ricky Holland's newborn sister

John Bumgardner

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Lansing - A court will decide if the biological mother of Ricky Holland will be allowed to keep her 5th child, born this week.

Ricky Holland, 7, was killed last year in Ingham County while in the custody of his adopted parents Tim and Lisa Holland.

The couple is accused of killing Ricky.

The Detroit News is reporting his biological mother, Casey Jo Caswell, gave birth to a girl on Wednesday.

The state took custody of the infant shortly after the birth.

The state has seized all of Caswell's children because her husband is a convicted sex offender.

A preliminary hearing over the newborn's custody is set for Sept. 7th.

Web Editor: [Matt Campbell](#), Producer

Web Editor: [John Bumgardner](#), Assignment Desk



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Couple await autopsy report

Friday, September 01, 2006

By John Tunison

The Grand Rapids Press

HOLLAND -- A Holland couple, free on bond following murder charges involving their daughter's death in Texas, hope a new autopsy report will finally clear them.

Authorities are not yet releasing details.

"We just want this to be over with," Esther Gonzales, 24, said Thursday. "They have made us out as bad people, and we are not."

Gonzales and her husband, Cipriano, are charged in Hays County, Texas, with killing their 2-month-old daughter, Cynthea. They were released from jail in July pending a possible indictment in the March death.

The case against the Holland couple, who moved to Texas eight days before their daughter died, has been punctuated by a series of twists, turns and oddities.

They include conflicting statements from medical examiners, the unintended disposal of the child's brain and an unauthorized extradition of the couple from Ottawa County in May.

A Texas medical examiner initially ruled the cause of death as inconclusive, but noted the possibility of child abuse because of healed rib fractures and bruising under the scalp.

Another medical examiner, sought for a second opinion by police, labeled the cause of death as "severe head trauma," although he did not have access to the brain. Dr. Nizam Peerwani, however, later said he had not issued a final conclusion and wanted to examine brain slides and other evidence.

Peerwani gave that report to prosecutors Wednesday.

Assistant Prosecutor Wes Mau said San Marcos police, who issued the charges, plan to do follow-up interviews with witnesses in the next several days.

A grand jury could consider indictments when it convenes Sept. 6, but the case could also be presented at the jury's meeting date in mid-October, should prosecutors decide to pursue a trial.

Esther Gonzales's attorney, John Moritz, is confident the couple will be proven innocent, even if the second autopsy rules the death a homicide. The first autopsy, where the examiner had access to the brain, is the most important, he said.

"If this is an (autopsy) draw, we win," he said.

Meanwhile, Esther Gonzales is keeping busy in Holland raising her 3-year-old daughter, Skyli, and trying to

make a living. She plans to start a job next week at West Michigan Uniform.

The couple, arrested in Holland in March after returning for Cynthea's funeral, have always maintained their innocence. They say she stopped breathing as they tried to feed her a bottle, just days before taking her to the hospital for breathing problems.

"We're not scared to go back (to Texas), because we know we didn't do anything wrong," Esther Gonzales said. "We just want this to be cleared up as soon as possible."

Send e-mail to the author: jtunison@grpress.com

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Workshops set to confront issue of child abuse

Saturday, September 02, 2006

By Marla Miller

CHRONICLE STAFF WRITER

The taboo topic of child sexual abuse will be discussed in area churches this fall in hopes of raising awareness that it takes a community to protect children from sexual predators, according to the workshop's facilitator.

The free, three-hour training will be interactive and cover topics such as reducing risk, minimizing abuse opportunities, staying alert to signs, making plans if abuse is suspected, acting on suspicions and being involved.

"The people who get this training walk away saying 'Wow!' " said Deb Anderson, workshop facilitator and prevention education director for the Child Abuse Council.

The program, "Stewards of Children," is aimed at parents, grandparents, educators, clergy, youth leaders or anyone concerned about the welfare of children. Anderson teaches sexual abuse prevention in the schools, but said "children are children and they don't have awareness of physical boundaries like adults. (In cases of abuse) inevitably, it's someone the child knows and 60 percent of the time it's someone that family trusts."

The Child Abuse Council in partnership with Love INC of Muskegon decided to invite churches to host the workshops to reach new audiences. So far, six churches have shown interest and four have scheduled the training, said Gail Kraft, executive director of Love INC.

"It's an opportunity for churches to do some outreach, and it's a message that needs to be heard to protect children," Kraft said. "We want the community to understand this is for them, the church is just hosting it."

Statistically, one out of every four girls and one out of every six boys will be sexually abused by age 18, Anderson said. Victims often become prostitutes or criminals and have emotional scars that can last a lifetime.

"It's like a circle if it's not stopped," she said. "Sexual abuse doesn't know any kind of economic or racial boundaries. It happens everywhere."

Warning signs can be hard to detect because they can be symptoms of other emotional or physical issues. Some of the major ones include: having nightmares, regressing to an infantile state, not wanting to leave home, being afraid of a certain person, sexualized behavior not appropriate to a child's age, a sudden drop in grades, alcohol and drug abuse, running away and attempted suicide.

Parents should ask questions about their children's activities and pay attention to what their kids say -- especially if they notice sudden changes in behavior or attitude, according to Anderson.

"It's about reducing the risks and thinking before we put children in certain situations," Anderson said. "It's about communicating so kids will come to you if they feel uncomfortable with a person."

Anderson and Kraft hope to organize more "Stewards of Children" workshops in the community as word of the workshops spreads.

Any church or organization interested in hosting a training session can contract Kraft at 773-3448.

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What's cooking in your neighborhood?

By JOHN EBY / Dowagiac Daily News
Friday, September 1, 2006 10:25 AM EDT

Cass County's Meth Task Force is in the midst of distributing a quantity of public education materials. The rollout continues through September.

Meth Watch materials aim at educating retailers, who received training in June.

During road patrols, the Sheriff's Office is distributing Meth Watch retailer packets containing customer information sheets, door signs, shelf signs and an employee poster alerting workers to "pre-cursor" methamphetamine "cooks" might buy, such as cold pills containing ephedrine or pseudoephedrine, acetone, rubbing alcohol, isopropyl alcohol, starter fluid (ether), gasoline additives (methanol), drain cleaner (sulfuric acid), lithium batteries, rock salt, matchbooks (red phosphorous), lye, paint thinner, aluminum foil, glassware, coffee filters and propane tanks.

"In this one more way, the Cass County Sheriff's Office continues to be a leader in the fight against meth and should be congratulated for its efforts," Jen Lester, task force coordinator through Woodlands Addition Center in Vandalia, said Thursday.

She said retailers pose a "major line of defense against meth manufacturing" and protect their inventory and increase employee and customer safety by participating in the Meth Watch program.

Participating restaurants include Porky's, Kulesia's, Big Eddies, the Council on Aging, Broadway Cafe and a Subway in Cassopolis, with Dowagiac, Edwardsburg, Decatur and Marcellus restaurants approached for participation within the next week.

Participating groceries include Felpausch Food Center, Save-a-Lot and Harding's in Cassopolis. Edwardsburg, Decatur and Marcellus groceries will be approached for participation within the next week also.

Note pads have been produced to give away at public events, such as the county fair or agricultural seminars. Table tents go on restaurant table tops and as cashier-counter giveaways.

An 8 1/2x11-inch document is a grocery bag stuffer distributed through local checkout lanes.

"We have been thrilled with the responsiveness of local restaurants and grocery stores willing to participate in this public education effort," Lester said. "Just as encouraging is seeing the Meth Watch signage on entry doors of so many Meth Watch and other public education efforts to know increased awareness leads to decreased manufacturing and related crime. The businesses participating in this effort should be properly recognized by patrons for improving our safety and protecting the quality of life we enjoy in Cass County."

Also being released in two stages is a resource directory. The first stage is to Cass County professional Department of Human Services, Health Department, probation and parole officers, lawyers, elected township officials and county commissioners.

These will be mailed early next week. The second stage will be through the (prisoner) Discharge Planning Committee, New Hope, a drug testing facility for probationers and parolees and Community Mental Health and Addictions Treatment Center lobbies.

"This directory is created in recognition that none of us are immune to life-threatening addictions," Lester said.

"Once addicted, a meaningful recovery means rebuilding destroyed areas of a life" through employment, housing, medical and dental care and transportation.

"This rebuilding usually won't occur without the intervention and support of other individuals and human service agencies," she said. "And rebuilding can be a daunting task for anyone, but for someone whose functioning has been severely impaired through drug abuse, the task looms even larger. The task force wants to support the commitment of recovering addicts and those affected by them and to recognize their efforts as an essential part of the fight against meth, resulting crime and its victims and harm to families in our county."

Lester said the task force is also creating a "family-friendly" Web site (MethTalk.org) that will go live later this fall.

Unlike many meth Web sites that contain graphic information and depictions unsuitable for some, MethTalk.org plans to include information contained in the resource directory, as well as meth-specific information appropriate for all Cass County residents.

Lester said the fight against supply-and-demand of drugs of abuse must be waged collaboratively on three fronts - interdiction, prevention and treatment - to succeed:

€ Interdiction - seizure of drug shipments, closure of manufacturing/growing operations, arrests of users and successful prosecution and appropriate sentencing of those found responsible.

€ Prevention - public education and awareness, parent and student education, public policy and law enforcement advertising campaigns, community coalitions and any other effort that discourages use and abuse of drugs and changes tolerant community perceptions about drug use/abuse.

€ Treatment - alternatively meeting the needs of those who used/abused drugs believing it would improve their life circumstances and teaching and supporting their alternative choices.

Family members and other partners who developed coping skills that improved their survival within the household - but consequently lessened their success outside of the home - are in need of treatment to appropriately support the recovering addict, discard and replace their own dysfunctional coping skills and heal emotional and psychological wounds.

"We are fortunate to live in a county where our sheriff, prosecuting attorney, the Dowagiac police chief and other area law enforcement leaders anticipated the influx of methamphetamine," Lester said.

"They responded proactively, along with residents who supported a special law enforcement millage" in August 2004 - even before the task force formed.

"The sheriff, prosecutor and local police chiefs continue to promote a successful and effective fight against meth in Cass County.

"Woodlands Behavioral Healthcare and the Health Department also have a proactive history of prevention efforts within our schools and with individuals. Proactive community members, like those serving on the methamphetamine task force during the past year, are making a strong and positive impact."

"Treatment efforts continue from a dedicated circle of professionals working in Cass County," Lester continued.

"Unfortunately, substance abuse treatment dollars have slowly declined or stayed much the same over the past two decades in Michigan and in Cass County and limit the range and depth of treatment provided. As a task force we are actively encouraging our state and federal legislators to increase treatment funding."

encourage our community to do the same."



Law targets pedophiles

25-year minimum for first time, mandatory life for repeaters

PUBLISHED: September 3, 2006

By Jameson Cook
Macomb Daily Staff Writer

A new set of state laws that took effect last week toughens penalties against pedophiles, creating minimum mandatory sentences of life in prison or 25 years in prison, and putting offenders on lifetime tethers.

Hailed by law enforcement officials and politicians, the laws are part of a nationwide effort to enact "Jessica's Law" and a signal that society believes that pedophiles cannot be rehabilitated and should be locked up.

State Rep. Phil Pavlov, R-St. Clair Township, who introduced two of the main bills in Michigan, said the disgust people have had with repeat crimes by child rapists and molesters led to fairly easy passage of the laws earlier this year.

"It's a belief that pedophiles cannot change," Pavlov said. "You have almost a 100 percent repeat rate (among child predators). When they're behind bars, they're not out there looking for their next victim. Society has had enough."

The Macomb County Prosecutor's Office wholeheartedly supports the amendments, four in all, three of which address child victims.

"These are some really good changes. These are for the true pedophiles who are perpetrating against kids," said assistant Macomb prosecutor Suzanne Faunce, who heads the county prosecutor's office youth sex crimes unit. "Reoffending by

pedophiles is so high. Statistics show that pedophiles are likely to reoffend."

The amendments require judges to sentence anyone convicted of first-degree criminal sexual conduct on a child under 13 to a minimum of 25 years in prison, and lifetime parole.

Also, anyone with a prior sex conviction who sexually assaults a victim under 13 by force or coercion must be sentenced to life in prison with no chance of parole, the same penalty for first-degree, premeditated murder.

The stiffer penalties have drawn some concerns from defense attorneys, who worry that overzealous, pandering politicians have tied the hands of judges.

"The public perception of this is positive, but the changes were designed to appease the public," said attorney Jacob Femminineo.

"You're taking away the discretion of judges" in cases involving first-time offenders who must spend 25 years in prison from the result of testimony by a child, said attorney David Griem.

But county Prosecutor Eric Smith, formerly chief of the county sex-crimes unit, countered that even though the tougher penalties likely will result in more trials, he staunchly supports them because of the studies showing child predators' recidivism rates.

"There's no way of curing them; this is the only way to keep them from assaulting again," he said. "When a child is assaulted, their lives are disrupted for the rest of their lives. It never results in a better life for them."

The four amendments -- sponsored by Pavlov and David Law, R-Commerce Township -- are part of a nationwide effort to heighten penalties against adults who sexually assault young children. Smith said Florida was the first state to enact the quarter-century minimum sentence, and many states have followed.

The Florida effort followed the gruesome tale of 9-year-old Jessica Lunsford, who was raped, given drugs and killed last year, according to police, by John Evander Couey, a repeat offender.

Jessica's father, Mark, testified in front of state lawmakers earlier

this year, and the laws were quickly passed and signed by Gov. Jennifer Granholm. Mark Lunsford has toured the country testifying before state legislatures.

The changes in the laws took effect Monday, Aug. 28, meaning that an incident that occurs after that date will be subject to the new penalties.

First-degree and third-degree CSC includes penetration by the offender. First-degree, which carries a maximum penalty of life in prison, includes a variety of circumstances that include under age 13 or use of physical force, incest, position of authority, same household or during commission of a felony. Third-degree CSC includes a victim aged 13-15 or nonphysical force, or an incapacitated victim.

The new laws only affect adult offenders victimizing children under 13.

The minimum sentence for both first- and third-degree CSC depends on sentencing guidelines.

The 25-year minimum sentence for first-time offending adults against children will have a major impact in Macomb since they commonly have received sentences well-below 25 years, sometimes below 10 years.

Two defendants -- Brian Klecha, 43, of Clinton Township and William Coy Catron, 47, of Warren -- in August made pleas to first-degree CSC and received minimum sentences of 11 years and 10 years, respectively. Another defendant, Richard Ashman, 70, of Roseville, who pleaded guilty to assaulting two of his granddaughters in the first degree, last December received a minimum sentence of six years in prison.

Officials note that most sex offenders are not released on their first chance for parole so many defendants serve years beyond their minimum sentence. The parole rate in 2004 for sex offenders was 13 percent, according to the Michigan Department of Corrections. Between 1997 and 2003, the rate has ranged between 10 and 18 percent each year. By comparison, between 1990 and 1996, the rate ranged from 46 percent in 1990 to 20 percent in 1995.

The parole rates are substantially below those convicted of violent,

nonviolent and drug crimes, according to the DOC.

Griem, a criminal defense attorney, said the 25-year minimum penalty for a first-time offender "scares the hell out of me" because it usually revolves around the credibility of young accusers, who can be coached by an adult guardian.

"You see these divorce cases from hell," Griem said. "An adult for his or her own personal reasons may manipulate a child to gain an advantage over someone else in a divorce case, or you may have allegations against a school teacher by a parent who has had a run-in with the teacher.

"To have a 25-year mandatory sentence from someone with no history of illicit contact with children scares the hell out of me."

But Prosecutor Smith said investigators from his office and other agencies diligently screen a youth accuser and adult defendant. The police interview of a child victim is viewed by several experts on the subject matter. And every sex-crime suspect by law must be offered the chance to undergo a polygraph examination, which cannot be used as evidence but serves as a valuable "investigative tool," Smith said.

Pavlov said society must rely on its justice system to reach fair resolutions.

"You've got to prove it to a jury," he said. "These cases are not just based on a child's testimony. We've put it in the hands of the jury. There are going to be some battles out there (in courtrooms)."

Pavlov said although he hasn't noticed a pattern of lenient judges in Michigan, "the mandatory aspect of the law doesn't let judges make a bad decision."

Griem, who noted he is the parent of three children, said he objects less to the mandatory life prison sentence for a convicted child rapist who reoffends again.

"With a subsequent offender, the likelihood that you've got the right person is greatly increased," Griem said. "I'm certainly not a proponent of pedophiles. Those who have been proven to be a pedophile deserve the harshest treatment possible."

Two other major changes in the sex-crime laws also took effect, one that affects crimes against youth. These were sponsored by state Rep. Law.

Anyone who is released from parole after a conviction for first- or second-degree CSC must serve the rest of their life on a tether equipped with a global positioning device.

Proponents say it will allow authorities to keep track of offenders to help ensure that if they try to reoffend, they can be stopped.

That aspect, Femminineo argued, could prove to be difficult to execute and a violation of the U.S. Constitution as "cruel and unusual punishment."

That system is several years down the road since it only applies to incidents that occurred after Aug. 28.

Another new wrinkle involves concurrent vs. consecutive sentences. Previously, those convicted of a sexual assault along with other crimes or other sexual assaults in the same "transaction," the term used in the law, would serve their sentences concurrently. Under the change, sex offenses and other offenses committed as part of one event will be sentenced consecutively, one on top of another.

Faunce said someone convicted of raping a victim several times during the same incident now could face several multiyear sentences instead of just one.

Faunce said rape victims often are surprised that their attacker must serve a sentence for one count of the rape even though he raped her multiple times.

"I don't know how many times I've had women look at me with wide eyes and say, 'But I was raped 10 times,'" Faunce said.

Faunce conceded that some cases likely will have "room for interpretation" by higher courts. For instance, prosecutors could try to argue that a rape of a child over months or years can be construed as being part of the same event so each count should be sentenced consecutively.

Defense attorneys agreed with prosecutors that the amendments

likely will create more trials because most offenders will not want to plead guilty to an offense that carries a life or 25-year prison sentence.

In Macomb, pleas are rarely offered to child rapists and molesters.

The result also could have ramifications years ahead because it will create longer prison terms for a whole segment of convicts.

"It's going to have an impact on corrections budgets, but the bottom line is, 'Do we want to keep them off the streets?'"

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http://www.macombdaily.com/stories/090306/loc_pedlaw001.shtml



KALAMAZOO GAZETTE

State boosts funding for prevention Medicaid reform aimed at curbing costly treatments

Tuesday, September 5, 2006

By Sharon Emery

Gazette News Service

LANSING -- Looking to head off mounting costs in a Medicaid program that could soon cover a record 1.6 million state residents, Michigan will begin paying doctors about 30 percent more for wellness checks and physicals for low-income children and adults.

Part of 2007 state budget negotiations, the idea is to up reimbursement rates in the \$7.5 billion state-federal health-care program so that more doctors agree to provide preventive care, which can pre-empt the more expensive care needed when ailments aren't treated early.

Doctors have been increasingly reluctant to accept Medicaid patients because of low reimbursement rates. About 88 percent of doctors responding to a Michigan State Medical Society survey in 1999 accepted Medicaid patients; last year only about 65 percent did.

Blue Cross Blue Shield currently reimburses doctors about \$129 for a head-to-toe physical for new patients ages 1 to 4 years; Medicaid pays about \$59. With the increase, Medicaid would pay about \$77. For new adult patients, Medicaid reimbursement for a physical would jump from about \$80 to about \$104.

While the increase starting Oct. 1 won't totally cover expenses, Dr. Paul O. Farr, president of the medical society and a Grand Rapids gastroenterologist, agreed that preventive care is where the money should go.

"If you have to put it on only one thing, it should be where you can prevent the big expenses later -- treating hypertension and high cholesterol, preventing smoking," Farr said.

Paying doctors more for preventive care will cost about \$16.6 million, according to T.J. Bucholz, a spokesman for the Michigan Department of Community Health.

It will be covered by cost-cutting in other parts of the Medicaid budget, including more vigorous pursuit of payment by other insurers and reducing errors in determining who's eligible for Medicaid, Bucholz said.

Lawmakers had become well aware of the problem.

"Doctors were discouraged because they could not afford to see Medicaid patients, and the patients were frustrated because of the limited services available to them," Rep. Bruce Caswell, R-Hillsdale, chairman of the appropriations subcommittee on community health, said in a statement. But advocates for the poor hesitated to assume that raising the reimbursement rate would entice more doctors to take Medicaid.

"It remains to be seen whether that increase will make much of a difference," said Jane Zehnder-Merrell, of the Michigan League for Human Services. "Rates are so far below the standard rate that even with the increase, it may not be enough to bring the Medicaid rate in line."

Keeping Medicaid patients from making unnecessary trips to expensive hospital emergency rooms is

another part of the strategy. ``This will also help ease the burden on emergency-room services since doctors will have a better handle on any problems before they become critical and require an ER visit," Caswell said.

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This is a printer friendly version of an article from **The Detroit News**

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September 5, 2006

Thousands miss out on cheap county health care

Lack of promotion, lots of confusion lead to little use of Wayne County coverage options.

Sharon Terlep / The Detroit News

As layoffs and cutbacks in employer-provided health care swell the ranks of Wayne County's uninsured, locally run programs designed to help those in need of medical care are vastly underused.

Thousands of Wayne County's uninsured could get cheap or free medical coverage, but they aren't, mostly because they're unaware such options exist or they don't know how to take advantage of them, county health officials said.

The county's array of options -- which include \$85-a-month health coverage for young adults and a program in which patients can see a doctor for just \$3 -- are sparsely promoted and often too confusing to attract those who need it most, the officials said.

The county is striving to get the word out about the programs but lacks the cash for a major advertising drive.

The county also faces other obstacles: Some of those in need are reluctant to ask for government help. Others can't spare even a little cash for medical coverage.

"There's a lot of voices out there saying a lot of things -- 'Buy me, buy me,' " said Vernice Anthony, president and chief executive officer of the Greater Detroit Area Health Council, a group of area business and health care leaders working to improve the region's health care.

"These programs need to be put together in a way that people hear a trusted message from a trusted voice," she added. The Wayne County Patient Care Management System administers seven programs that offer varying types of health care. The agency has a \$47 million budget and joins with different insurance companies or the state to administer benefits.

Other metropolitan counties have programs for the uninsured, though Wayne, with more than 700,000 underinsured and uninsured residents, has the most options. Macomb County this year began offering a program similar to one of Wayne's, and 1,000 people have already signed up for about 1,500 openings.

At the state level, Michigan has had a hard time getting uninsured children enrolled in Medicaid or MiChild, a coverage option for kids, even though 7 in 10 Michigan children are eligible for the low-cost options.

Help is out there

Wayne County's CareFirst Plus is an example of a vastly underused program.

That program lets newly uninsured or unemployed patients see a doctor for \$3 and get prescription drugs for \$5. The only requirement: having no health coverage and being turned down for coverage by the state's Family Independence Agency, which aids Michigan's poor.

Fewer than 3,100 people are signed up for that program, though there is enough money to cover 6,000. "I had no clue those things existed," said Loretta Winkles of Taylor, who has been without health care since 2002.

"I just pretty much figured that I was out of luck, so I gave up," said Winkles, 46, who lost her coverage when the Big Boy restaurant where she works stopped offering health care benefits. She has rheumatoid arthritis and has been treated for cervical cancer.

Among the county's programs:

Only one offering, DentalAssist, which provides limited dental benefits, is almost full, with more than 5,800 of 6,000 spots filled.

The Young Adult Program, in which 18- to 30-year-olds who make less than \$30,000 a year can get coverage for \$85 a month, can take 1,000 people but has only 100 enrolled.

HealthChoice of Michigan, in which employers, employees and the county each pay \$45 a month for the workers' medical coverage, has 3,700 members; there's room for 10,000.

"We're working on all of it," Lorenzo Lopez, deputy director of the Wayne County Patient Care Management

System, said of efforts to get the word out.

Lopez said the agency has been pitching the services at health fairs and local expos. It has used billboards and bus advertisements to promote the program. Television ads are too expensive, he said.

"When we think of marketing, we think on the grand scale of things, but we need to get the grass-roots people," he said. "Sometimes people might not look at billboards, but they would read a church bulletin."

Many don't know where to go

In many cases, it's not the poor who aren't getting help, but those who have recently become unemployed or lost their insurance. People who have been jobless for a long time or who fall below poverty level often are familiar with the services and are eligible for federal and state programs.

Those who find themselves in need for the first time are less likely to know where to go. When they do look for help, they're bombarded with private companies hawking low-cost coverage and with public programs.

"There's no way to weed through all of this," Anthony said. "It leaves people feeling that nothing is reliable" except a Blue Cross Blue Shield card or a Health Alliance Plan card."

Daniel Harnphanich is among those who have managed to tap the county for health care. For nearly a decade, he's been using HealthChoice of Michigan to offer benefits to workers at the Lucky Dragon restaurant he owns in Detroit.

The program has existed for years, but he finds small business owners are surprised when he tells them about it. "I was skeptical and thought that because it had cheaper rates there'd be \$50 co-pays and no prescriptions. It turns out to be quite the opposite. It's working out pretty good."

You can reach Sharon Terlep at (313)223-4686 or sterlep@detnews.com.

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Search Continues For Missing Teen

Girl Suffers Mental Illnesses

POSTED: 8:14 am EDT September 5, 2006

The search continues for a 15-year-old girl from Hastings who has been missing for six days.

Ava Gardner said she dropped off her daughter, Ashley See, at school last Wednesday, and hasn't seen her since.

Gardner received a tip call from a guard at a McDonald's on Detroit's east side, telling her he saw Ashley visiting the restaurant with two other girls.

Ashley's family is offering a \$1,000 reward for information that leads to her safe return.

Ashley suffers from several mental illnesses and is without her medication.

If you've seen Ashley or have any information, call Michigan State Police at 313-456-6600.

Previous Stories:

- September 3, 2006: [Police Search For Missing Teen](#)

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State funds more preventive care for Medicaid

Tuesday, September 05, 2006

By Sharon Emery

Lansing Bureau

LANSING -- Looking to head off mounting costs in a Medicaid program that could soon cover a record 1.6 million state residents, Michigan will begin paying doctors about 30 percent more for wellness checks and physicals for low-income children and adults.

Part of 2007 state budget negotiations, the idea is to up reimbursement rates in the \$7.5 billion state-federal health care program so that more doctors agree to provide preventive care, which can pre-empt the more expensive care needed when ailments aren't treated early.

Doctors have been increasingly reluctant to accept Medicaid patients due to low reimbursement rates. About 88 percent of doctors responding to a Michigan State Medical Society survey in 1999 accepted Medicaid patients; last year only about 65 percent did.

Blue Cross Blue Shield currently reimburses doctors about \$129 for a head-to-toe physical for new patients 1 to 4 years old; Medicaid pays about \$59. With the increase, Medicaid would pay about \$77. For new adult patients, Medicaid reimbursement for a physical would jump from about \$80 to about \$104.

While the increase starting Oct. 1 won't totally cover expenses, Dr. Paul O. Farr, president of the medical society and a Grand Rapids gastroenterologist, agreed that preventive care is where the money should go.

"If you have to put it on only one thing, it should be where you can prevent the big expenses later -- treating hypertension and high cholesterol, preventing smoking," Farr said.

"If you don't have a family doctor, you don't have anybody getting on your case about not smoking," for example.

Paying doctors more for preventive care will cost about \$16.6 million, according to T.J. Bucholz, a spokesman for the Department of Community Health. It will be covered by cost-cutting in other parts of the Medicaid budget, including more vigorous pursuit of payment by other insurers and reducing errors in determining who's eligible for Medicaid, Bucholz said.

"There is growing recognition that by ensuring that our Medicaid program is as robust as possible, we avoid the increasing costs of the uninsured, which ultimately benefits everybody," Bucholz said.

Indeed, lawmakers from both parties had become well aware of the problem.

"Doctors were discouraged because they could not afford to see Medicaid patients, and the patients were frustrated because of the limited services available to them," Rep. Bruce Caswell, R-Hillsdale, chair of the Appropriations subcommittee on community health, said in a statement.

But advocates for the poor hesitated to assume that hiking the reimbursement rate would entice more doctors to take Medicaid.

"It remains to be seen whether that increase will make much of a difference," said Jane Zehnder-Merrell, of

the Michigan League for Human Services. "Rates are so far below the standard rate that even with the increase, it may not be enough to bring the Medicaid rate in line."

Keeping Medicaid patients from making unnecessary trips to expensive hospital emergency rooms is another part of the strategy.

"This will also help ease the burden on emergency room services since doctors will have a better handle on any problems before they become critical and require an ER visit," Caswell said.

Contact Sharon Emery at (517) 487-8888 x236 or e-mail her at semery@boothnewspapers.com.

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Reimbursement

Tuesday, September 05, 2006

Medicaid reimburses doctors at about half the rate paid by Blue Cross Blue Shield for in-office physicals. The first number is Medicaid. The second is Blue Cross:

New patient ages 1-4 \$59 \$129

New patient ages 40-64 \$80 \$175

Established patient ages 1-4 \$50 \$98

Established patient ages 40-64 \$61 \$134

Source: Michigan State Medical Society

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This is a printer friendly version of an article from **Lansing State Journal**. To print this article open the file menu and choose Print.

Published September 3, 2006

Elizabeth Jesse: Engage arrested teens to disrupt cycle

Elizabeth Jesse of Eaton Rapids is a member of the Eaton County BARJ initiative.

Learn more

- To learn more about BARJ, contact Jay Stark-Dykema at Community Mental Health of Clinton, Eaton and Ingham Counties at 346-8060.

Balanced and Restorative Justice -

BARJ - has been making headlines of late in the Greater Lansing area due to its success in holding youth accountable for illegal or harmful behavior.

Why is BARJ working while the usual methods of handling the problem of delinquent youth are failing?

First, a brief overview of Balanced and Restorative Justice:

It is a philosophy that does not merely punish young people for negative behavior, but one that has them meet face-to-face with their victim(s), and answer to them for the harm they have caused. This is accomplished during a very structured conference run by a trained facilitator. In addition, the conference is held with the voluntary consent of all interested parties.

Normally offenders will be motivated to attend the conference because if they do attend and follow through with the group's plan to repair the harm, they can avoid prosecution, school suspension, and/or expulsion. In addition, the youth may enjoy other benefits, including an opportunity to apologize and be accepted back into the community.

There is also a compelling reason for the victim to join in the conference. The victim is given a voice in deciding what will repair the harm. How often do you see this happen in the usual scenario? Normally, the juvenile is punished or fined and the victim never has a say or gains any healing from the process.

I, along with many others such as police, teachers, school administrators and other concerned people in the community, have been formally trained to facilitate a BARJ conference. Most of us are volunteers with busy lives, but we do this because we have seen the positive effects this process has on the youth involved.

The statistics in the BARJ pilot programs that began in 2005 are showing amazing results. There have been reductions in rates of school disciplinary referrals to the office, subsequent incidents of disruptive behavior, the number of out-of-school suspensions, and the rate of juvenile prosecution.

In my opinion, this program is "rocking" the juvenile justice system in a most positive way.

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Grand Haven Tribune

Sheriff's office investigating vehicle thefts

GEORGETOWN TOWNSHIP — Four juvenile suspects have been petitioned to the Ottawa County Juvenile Court regarding stolen vehicle reports and thefts from vehicles in Georgetown Township.

During the morning of Aug. 29, Ottawa County Sheriff's Department deputies confronted the four juveniles, whose names are being withheld because of their age, in two stolen vehicles, said Sgt. William Ward, supervisor of the Sheriff's Department's Georgetown Township branch. During their investigation, they learned that other juveniles from Grand Rapids are also involved in the thefts, which took place during the late night and early morning hours throughout Georgetown Township, he added.

Ward said area residents should secure their property by parking in garages, if possible, removing their keys and valuables from their vehicles, lowering their garage doors at night, and locking both their vehicles and any service doors to their garages.

The Sheriff's Department is continuing its investigation, Ward said.

Man Charged With Beating Woman, Unborn Child

September 1, 2006

WYOMING -- A premature baby boy is in critical condition at Saint Mary's Health Care, his mother still recovering from a brutal beating earlier this week.

In the early morning hours on Monday, a man went to the area of Division Avenue and 28th Street, and picked up a 28-year-old woman; an admitted prostitute. He brought her back to his home on Buchanan near 44th Street. That's when a terrifying 20-hour long ordeal began.

"She stated upon entering the home she was attacked from behind and she said she was hit with a hard object, knocked down, beaten," Lt. Paul Robinson of the Wyoming Police Department told FOX 17 News.

After beating and raping the woman repeatedly, even threatening her with a gun, the man dropped her off in an alley near Saint Mary's Medical Center.

"He decided to get her out of the house, he did threaten her according to her statement, when he dropped her off at the hospital he told her he'd kill her if she reported the event," said Lt. Robinson.

Police arrested 26-year-old Gary Alan Walker, wanted on a bench warrant for failing to attend his sentencing for drunk driving last month.

Police say Walker made statements that back up the victim's story. The woman had injuries all over her body. She'd been beaten with a wooden dowel and bottles. She was also seven months pregnant; a day after the assault, doctors had to perform an emergency C-section, two months early. The baby is in critical condition.

"The hospital determined that the placenta separated from the child so they had to have an early, a premature birth to save the baby." said Lt. Robinson.

Walker is charged with kidnapping, rape assault and assault to a fetus. If convicted, he could get up to life in prison.

"This is an extremely dangerous human being and so are efforts are to not have this happen to anybody else," said Lt. Robinson.

Bond for Walker is set at half a million dollars.

The baby also has crack cocaine in his system; a complication from his mother's drug abuse during the pregnancy.

Wyoming Police are contacting other agencies statewide to see if this assault matches any other open cases.



THE BAY CITY TIMES

Prosecutor drops charges against Huron County shelter worker

Monday, September 04, 2006

By TOM GILCHRIST

TIMES WRITER

BAD AXE - Brenda L. Brooks faced a possible prison sentence after prosecutors accused her of crimes for not letting a Bad Axe police officer inside Huron County's domestic-violence shelter.

But Huron County District Judge Karl E. Kraus has dismissed the charges against Brooks - a worker at the Huron County SafePlace - at the request of county Prosecutor Mark J. Gaertner.

Gaertner has declined comment on the reason for dropping the two counts of resisting and obstructing police. A spokeswoman said the prosecutor would issue a media release this week on the situation.

But the May 8 arrest of Brooks by Bad Axe Police Department Lt. David Rothe has some folks talking around Bad Axe.

In a letter to The Times, Huron County SafePlace Managing Director Amy C. Kain claimed police and Gaertner made "incorrect statements" in the case against Brooks, 49, of Bad Axe, still employed at the shelter for women and children who are victims of domestic violence.

Rothe claims Brooks repeatedly refused him entrance to the shelter when he responded to the building along West Soper Road on May 8 for a report of a 35-year-old woman with a back injury. The officer said he learned from paramedic James T. Horiski that the back injury actually was a drug overdose.

But Kain said the original 911 call involved a report of back pain instead of an "injury."

"The police then decided to open an investigation based on verbal reports from the ambulance personnel that it was a possible drug overdose," Kain wrote.

Kain said Horiski "is not qualified to make that diagnosis."

Rothe said the woman spent several days in intensive care at the hospital, but Kain claims the woman spent less than one day in the hospital.

The Huron County SafePlace opened late in 2005, housing women and children who are victims of domestic violence.

Kain said Rothe and Huron County Assistant Prosecutor Elizabeth V. Weisenbach - a member of the Board of Directors overseeing the SafePlace - commandeered the shelter after arresting Brooks on May 8.

"With no staff person on site, they took over operations and left our crisis line unmanned for over 15 minutes," Kain stated.

Kain alleged Weisenbach acted on her own and not with permission of the Board of Directors.

In her own written statement, however, Weisenbach said police officers "from at least two departments" have reported difficulties in dealing with SafePlace staff and in contacting residents of the shelter along West Soper Road.

Weisenbach also noted her disappointment that Brooks didn't let Rothe - on scene before the ambulance - examine the ailing shelter resident to see if he could render medical help.

"Minutes matter in life-or-death situations, and Ms. Brooks could have burdened herself and the shelter with a liability issue if that woman's condition would have deteriorated in those minutes," Weisenbach said.

The Times could not reach Brooks for comment.

Kain said the SafePlace operates with private funds. She said police have no right to enter the building without a search warrant "except in certain extraordinary situations."

But it was Kain who actually told Brooks to let police in, according to Rothe's police report.

Kain said she gave Brooks permission to let Rothe in, but said Rothe had left the shelter before Brooks could let him in. Rothe returned about an hour later with Weisenbach, according to Kain, who said the officer again would have needed Kain's permission to enter the shelter.

"An hour later it's a totally different situation," Kain said.

The officer's report also claims Brooks put her hands onto Weisenbach's chest area, physically preventing Weisenbach from entering the shelter.

Kain said she's not sure Brooks initiated any physical contact, noting Brooks' account of the encounter differs from Rothe's account and from Weisenbach's account.

After Rothe arrested Brooks, he interviewed three women living inside the shelter, and later questioned the victim, who had been taken to Huron Medical Center in Bad Axe.

Rothe said the victim told him she needed to "chill out" so she took three Soma pills given to her by her daughter's father in Bay City several days earlier.

An ambulance worker, however, told Rothe the shelter resident had a 20-pill bottle of the pain-killer Vicodin, with only two pills left in the bottle. The resident had been taking several pain medications prescribed to her only a few days before the May 8 call to 911 reporting her back problems, according to Rothe's report.

Kain said that if the shelter resident had taken the Vicodin at the prescribed intervals over a period of several days, there probably would be only two pills left in the bottle.

"If this was an overdose, I'm not sure it was intentional, and I'm not sure it was even an overdose, because (the shelter resident) was released from the hospital the next day," Kain said.

- Tom Gilchrist covers regional news for The Times. He can be reached at 894-9649 or by e-mail at tgilchrist@bc-times.com.

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KALAMAZOO GAZETTE

At last, some cooperation in Lansing

Sunday, September 3, 2006

It isn't often that state lawmakers and the governor hammer together a compromise that everyone regards as a win.

But on Wednesday, everybody gave a little and everybody got a little. And it looks like a win for many employers, and especially for low-income working families.

Lansing Democrats took advantage of a mistake Republican lawmakers made in their haste to pass a state minimum wage increase to keep it off the November ballot. The minimum wage legislation inadvertently forgot to include the job exemptions to overtime that had been in effect. And when Republicans wanted to restore the exemptions, Democrats said no way.

No way unless, of course, it is tied to something Democrats want, like a state Earned Income Tax Credit for low-income wage-earners.

There has long been a federal EITC, which has been a boon to poor working families. In 2002, according to a state report, the federal credit gave an estimated 600,000 low-income wage-earners about \$1 billion in tax credits, which immediately get pumped back into Michigan's economy. A state EITC, if approved by the House and signed by the governor, would be phased in over two years and be worth about 20 percent of the federal credit. It would cost the state about \$95 million in tax revenues the first year and \$250 million in the second.

Although Lansing Republicans have long opposed an EITC, we are glad lawmakers finally have come around. The EITC fits well within the Republican philosophy of tax cuts to help working families and stimulate the economy.

The agreement also allows employers to pay a lower minimum wage to minors. Instead of receiving \$6.95, which the minimum wage will increase to in October, workers under the age of 18 will be paid a minimum of \$5.91 an hour.

We believe this will offer employers of inexperienced teenagers incentive to keep them on the payroll instead of jettisoning them in favor of more-experienced adults. A growing number of adults may be relying on minimum-wage jobs to support their families, but workers 17 and younger rarely are.

In an election year, when there's too much partisan squabbling going on, we're happy to see some cooperation that will make a difference for many Michigan employers and wage-earners.

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Lansing earns some respect

Sunday, September 03, 2006

Lansing deserves a round of applause for compromising last week on the minimum wage, an earned income tax credit and a proposed expansion of the state's Merit Award scholarships.

Lawmakers on Wednesday agreed to fix a glitch in the minimum wage boost passed earlier in the year. With the exception of home health and day care workers, who will qualify for overtime under the new rules, the current time-and-a-half exemptions to minimum-wage jobs will remain.

More importantly, the addition of a state earned income tax credit will further help low-income families make ends meet. By putting additional dollars into the hands of people most likely to spend it, the change will help boost the state's depressed economy.

The tax credit will go to families who qualify now for federal earned income tax credits. In 2008, low-income taxpayers in Michigan will receive a cut equal to

10 percent of their federal credit. It rises to 20 percent in 2009. The change will boost the incomes -- as much as \$900 a year -- of some 600,000 families in Michigan.

The tweak approved Wednesday also creates a separate, lower minimum wage for teenagers. Employers said the higher wage would price some teens out of the job market. While the minimum wage for teens will only rise to \$5.91 an hour, the proposed change to Merit Awards will boost the money available for college. Students who perform well on state standardized tests now receive up to \$3,000 in two payments. The expansion would allow all students to qualify for up to \$4,000 if they get at least two years of college or technical school. So while workers under age 18 won't get the full wage increase, they can qualify for additional funds for education. It's a fair trade that will result in greater lifetime earnings for many.

With poverty increasing and wages flat in Michigan, the changes are all designed to lift people from the lower rungs of the economy and help more young people obtain the educations they need to compete.

In an age when partisanship, electioneering and upsmanship often impede policy fixes, Senate Majority Leader Kenneth Sikkema, the Republican leadership, Democrats and Gov. Jennifer Granholm have worked out changes that will benefit the working poor and create a more educated work force.

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Sep 4, 1:34 PM EDT

House leaders outline priorities for pre-election sessions

By TIM MARTIN
Associated Press Writer

LANSING, Mich. (AP) -- Both Republicans and Democrats in the state House are offering glimpses into their legislative priorities as lawmakers prepare to reconvene for pre-election sessions Tuesday.

Republicans hold a 58-49 edge in the House. That makes much of the GOP agenda a good bet to pass the chamber as lawmakers meet for three weeks in September.

Lawmakers in both the House and Senate could meet for a fourth week in late September, depending upon how much they get accomplished earlier in the month. But after that, the Legislature is not scheduled to be back until after the Nov. 7 election.

House Republicans say they want to wrap up work on a variety of bills they introduced or discussed earlier this session - including measures designed to combat mortgage fraud, identity theft and sexual predators who target children. House subcommittees also have been working on issues related to Michigan's parole and child protection systems.

The GOP also may push measures to change Michigan's welfare system, possibly including limits on how long recipients can receive benefits. Those measures have passed the House before but have not survived the state budget negotiation process, which includes Senate leaders and Gov. Jennifer Granholm.

House Speaker Craig DeRoche, a Republican from Novi, said all the measures are designed to improve government and stimulate Michigan's economic growth. The state has been saddled with a sluggish economy in recent years, including a 7 percent unemployment rate in July - tied for second-highest in the nation.

"Many people realize the strength of our economy is linked with the state's overall tax burden, but it's also tied to important factors like education, children's safety and stopping crime," DeRoche said in a statement.

Dan Farough, a spokesman for House Democrats, said lawmakers in his party also will focus on the economy.

Democrats this week are expected to announce legislation that would extend the amount

of time people who lose jobs could receive unemployment benefits.

The amount of money that unemployed people could receive in benefits also would increase under the upcoming Democratic proposal, Farough said.

Senate Democrats already have introduced a proposal that would extend the maximum amount of time a person can receive unemployment benefits from the current 26 weeks to 39 weeks.

A top priority for both political parties in the House this week will be finishing work on a deal to keep some workers exempt from overtime pay while helping others with relatively low incomes.

The House likely will pass legislation that would provide a state tax credit for low-income workers. The legislation, which passed the state Senate last week, would allow a state earned-income tax credit on top of the existing federal credit.

The deal also will establish a minimum wage for workers under 18 that is lower than for other employees. The younger workers would get \$5.91 an hour rather than \$6.95 when the minimum wage rises in October. The current rate is \$5.15 an hour.

On the Net:

Michigan Legislature: <http://www.legislature.mi.gov>

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Lawmakers ready to finish up overtime deal

9/3/2006, 8:21 a.m. ET

By **TIM MARTIN**
The Associated Press

LANSING, Mich. (AP) — The state House this week is expected to wrap up its end of a deal that will keep some workers exempt from overtime pay while helping others with relatively low incomes.

The House likely will pass legislation that would provide a state tax credit for low-income workers. The legislation, which passed the state Senate last week, would allow a state earned-income tax credit on top of the existing federal credit. The credit would start at 10 percent in 2008 and rise to 20 percent in 2009.

In 2004, about 663,000 families with incomes below \$35,458 received federal refund checks for earned-income tax credits, averaging \$1,764. Based on those numbers, families would get a refund check from the state for just above \$350 on average once the tax credit rises to 20 percent.

The earned income credit is part of a deal reached last week by the Republican-led Legislature and Democratic Gov. Jennifer Granholm.

"This was, I think, a reasonable compromise," said House Speaker Craig DeRoche, a Republican from Novi. "So I think it was a win for everyone involved."

The agreement also will keep salespeople, truckers and many other types of workers ineligible for overtime pay when the state's minimum wage rises from \$5.15 an hour to \$6.95 an hour in October. Both the Senate and House passed the legislation restoring the status quo on OT eligibility last week.

The deal also will establish a minimum wage for workers under 18 that is lower than for other employees. The younger workers would get \$5.91 an hour rather than \$6.95. The Senate passed the bill last week and the House is expected to pass the bill this week.

Both minimum wages are set to rise again in 2007 and 2008.

Supporters of the two-tiered minimum wage said it will help small businesses, who might not be able to afford younger employees at the higher rate. It could also help keep more younger workers employed.

House Minority Leader Dianne Byrum, D-Onondaga, said the deal never would have happened if Democrats hadn't pushed for a petition drive that could have placed a minimum wage proposal before voters this fall. Democrats call the deal a victory for working families.

Also this week, a state House subcommittee could release its recommendations to improve the state's parole system.

The committee held its final hearing last week on issues related to Patrick Selepak, a parolee who has pleaded guilty to killing three people earlier this year after mistakenly being released from prison.

Selepak has been sentenced to life in prison with no chance for parole in the murders.

The state Department of Corrections has clarified its policies and disciplined several employees related to the Selepak case. Lawmakers have passed some legislation related to the Selepak case and introduced other bills that are awaiting action.



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Published September 4, 2006

Labor: Wage, tax changes welcome, but state leaders have work to do

A Lansing State Journal editorial

Labor Day sprang from the ranks of the labor movement 125 years ago. Union labor has seen its size and influence wax and wane since.

Just last week, the LSJ reported on the continuing shrinkage of union membership in Michigan's labor force.

What will never change, though, is the need to protect the opportunity for citizens to do honest work in safe environments and be fairly compensated.

Labor unions now may claim only 20.5 percent of the state's work force, but their legacy is indelible: The 40-hour work week; overtime laws; personal benefits; workplace safety rules; the minimum wage. The voice and votes of organized labor pushed government to act in these directions.

And some momentum remains.

In a month, the state's minimum wage will rise from \$5.15 an hour to \$6.95 - and increase twice more in the next 20 months to an eventual \$7.40.

And just last week, a deal was struck to enact an earned income tax credit in Michigan, which will aid those who make the minimum wage or just above it.

Michigan could take more pride in these developments were it not for their circumstances.

The minimum wage boost was rushed through by legislative Republicans to forestall a statewide petition drive for a voter-enacted increase. And the tax credit was part of a deal needed to clean up problems created in the rushed legislation on the minimum wage.

The state, it seems, progresses in spite of itself.

Even these advances, though, leave many working citizens scrambling.

As detailed by a recent PBS program, "Waging a Living," even people making above the minimum wage - especially single parents - are staggering to provide for their families in the face of rising costs on medical care and other necessities.

Wages and taxes are just part of the 21st century labor equation. Soaring health-care costs and access. Retirement programs. Day-care and other support for working moms and single parents.

These are the issues for the modern labor movement; in fact, they're issues for all of Michigan.

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Agema Ready To Take On Immigrants

MIRS, September 1, 2006

Republican candidate Dave **AGEMA** is already conceptualizing legislation that would stop, what he considers to be, the state's illegal immigration problem, legislation that he plans on introducing if he wins the predominantly Republican 74th District House seat.

"I have an idea about the legislation but I don't want to get into it until after the election," Agema said.

Based on what Agema, 57, told *MIRS* about the concerns he has about the illegal immigrant population, the new legislation will likely include a way to monitor immigration and prevent immigrants from drawing on state education and health care funds.

"If I had to affect a positive change for Michigan, I would really like to see us get a handle on the illegal immigration," Agema said. "There are things the government is doing that makes it easy to get in the state and that's an issue. It's bankrupting healthcare."

Illegal immigrants are also having a draining impact on the state's education and welfare resources, Agema said. The state sees a large influx of Latinos and Middle Eastern people and the accessibility to state driver's licenses has caused some publications to conclude that Michigan is "kind of a magnet for them," Agema said.

Illegal immigration is an issue that Agema, who has fluctuated between private business and the military during his professional career, hit hard on during his campaign. He also hit other typical Republican platforms — lower taxes, reduced regulations — during his primary campaign, which resulted in him beating nine other Republican candidates during the primary election.

Agema's also ready to cut any fat from the budget, though he admits he doesn't know exactly where the cuts will be made.

"Just by the nature of the size of the state of Michigan, there are inefficiencies," Agema said. "Many businesses are leaving. We know that every department in the state has some areas that don't have to be funded. I don't know what they all are but I know they're there."

Agema is looking to replace Rep. William [**VAN REGENMORTER**](#) (R-Jenison), who has decided not to seek out a third term. Agema got interested in politics well before Van Regenmorter announced that he was pulling himself out of the political game.

"A lot of people have told me for years that I should get involved," Agema said.

But Agema didn't make a move toward state politics until Van Regenmorter called him and told him that he wouldn't be seeking a third term.

"He let me know that he wouldn't endorse anybody," Agema said. "I thought about it and thought, why not?"

Agema is still contemplating what committees he'd like to serve on but he's looking at homeland security, commerce, agriculture and appropriations. He does know that he needs to take a slightly different approach to politics than he does to flying planes, which is something he's done for years.

"One thing that pilots are good at — and this doesn't necessarily flow into politics — is analyzing a situation and taking the right action, which you better get right the first time. I think I need to slow myself down because I'm not flying and a politician needs to look at both sides."

Agema lives in Grandville with Barbara, his wife of 35 years. He has three kids and enjoys going hunting in Michigan and Canada with his son.

He said that during his campaign, people really warmed up to him when they learned he wasn't a career politician.

He reports that one constituent informed him: "If you go to Lansing and don't pass a law, you'll do us all a favor."



ourMidland.com
from the Midland Daily News

09/01/2006

Retailers, Camp talk health care, immigration

[Cheryl Wade](#) , Midland Daily News

Judy Lezote has the kind of young work force insurance companies like, and Lezote has decided to provide them with decent benefits.

But those benefits cost Lezote, a McDonald's Restaurant franchisee with six Michigan eateries, a good chunk of money, and she wishes there were a way to cut her expenses.

"I'm already dealing with people that aren't watching the stock market quotes, and they don't have any money in the bank to handle these catastrophic things," she told U.S. Rep. Dave Camp, R-Midland, Wednesday at a meeting with a handful of business people. "I can't go for the bargain-basement benefits because, if I do, they don't have any coverage."

Camp's Midland meeting, called a retail education event, was sponsored by the National Retail Federation. Camp hopes for health plans in which many small companies can join forces to buy health coverage at cheaper rates, and Lezote likes that idea.

The talk also moved to tax credits and immigration. Scott Vinson of the National Council of Chain Restaurants said he was disappointed that tax-credit measures must be renewed every year or two and that an "extender package" of bills that included renewal for the credits was stripped from the pension bill.

Welfare to Work and Work Opportunity tax credits help companies that hire welfare recipients, ex-convicts, the disabled and other disadvantaged people. Restaurants in his association need these workers and the credits to hire them, he said. He sees a looming crisis in the number of available service workers as older ones retire and families have fewer children to move into the jobs.

"We're not replacing workers quickly enough as the baby boom generation is nearing retirement," he said.

Camp said he, too, would like to see some certainty over the issue and hopes work to that end will get under way this fall.

On tax reform, Camp said he does not support a national retail sales tax because retailers "become the tax collectors for the entire nation."

When the talk turned to immigration, Lezote said a colleague at a McDonald's in northern Michigan had to hire foreign workers for the summer. And although she sees a need for these workers, she doesn't want the United States to fling its doors wide open.

"We have to be a little more careful (about) who comes through the doors and what they do when they're here," she said, citing worries about terrorism.

Camp said he's doubtful immigration reform will happen this year because House and Senate versions are very different.

"I think it's important that we secure the border first," he said. "We can't get the cart before the horse."

"It's very difficult to live in a risk-free world but you do want to reduce the risk," he continued.



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Published September 3, 2006

From migrant to mainstream

Many young workers leave farm fields for classrooms, better lives

By Tricia Bobeda
Lansing State Journal

Raul Saucedo's father told him that when he stepped into the fields, Raul was responsible only for himself.

That was when he was 11.

But Raul, now 22, hasn't forgotten the salty taste of sweat that poured down his face as he picked blueberries for hours at a time. Or the faces of the workers riding in an old school bus that bounced down dusty roads to the farm each morning.

They are Raul's friends. His family. And he wants a better life for them and for himself.

Buurma Farms in Gregory, about an hour southeast of Lansing, provides housing for its workers, a circle of stark white cinderblock homes made friendlier by flower gardens near the front steps. Its workers stay until October; then most move to southern states and return each spring.

A life of perpetual transition and physical labor have given Raul more than a bad back and an unbreakable



(Photo by BECKY SHINK/Lansing State Journal)
Victor Solan (right), originally from Veracruz, Mexico, bundles radishes after picking them from the fields at Buurma Farms in Gregory.

Class time

Children of seasonal farmworkers change schools several times a year as their parents move for their jobs.

Most of the families move in April to start working in the fields and leave after the harvest.

"They're missing a chunk of education," said Soledad Ramirez-Heiler, director of a Stockbridge summer migrant program that serves children in 11 camps in Ingham, Livingston and Jackson counties.

Ramirez-Heiler comes from a family of migrant workers and has worked with the summer program for 14 years.

Janie Moyeda, 17, whose family settled in Stockbridge after years of migrating from southern states to do farm work, attends Stockbridge High School but also participates in the Summer Migrant Program.

"It's different because sometimes at school you want to talk in Spanish, and in regular school you can only do that with your brothers," Janie said. "Here you can talk to everyone the same, and they will all understand."

There were 80 to 100 people enrolled this summer, but Ramirez-Heiler said attendance wasn't steady.

"It's such a nice spring, even some of our junior high kids are in the fields," she said.

work ethic.

"If I can improve the conditions for workers in the fields, that's what I'm going to do," he said.

Raul is among the more than 40,000 migrant farmworkers who feed Michigan's economy and provide produce to local grocery stores and Campbell Soup Co.

He also is part of an increasing number of migrant children taking the next step in the American immigrant story: Leaving the hard work on farms for better lives.

For many, it's not a movement away from their roots but a way of giving back and helping future generations.

Raul will finish a master's degree at MSU in Food Industry Management this year, which he hopes to use to assist others who work the fields.

Numbers bear out the transformation among the families:

- Children of Latino immigrants are 50 percent more likely than their parents to have a high school education, according to a recent study from the Pew Hispanic Center, a project of the Washington-based Pew Research Center.

- Fifty-seven percent of Latino immigrants report household incomes of less than \$30,000; that percentage drops to 37 percent for their children, the Pew center said.

The Saucedo family has earned a living as migrant farmworkers in Michigan for 25 years, living in Texas during the winter.

The Saucedos have three grown children, including Raul, who have left the fields and settled in Michigan; they also have a 4-year-old daughter,

Tough to tally

State agencies and researchers who focus on migrant and seasonal farmworkers in Michigan estimate the population at 40,000 to 150,000 people.

The numbers are difficult to determine because the population includes American citizens, documented immigrants and people in the country illegally.

The lack of concrete numbers also makes it difficult to identify trends. But many in the community say more farmers are hiring single men instead of taking on the burden of providing for families.

Helping workers

Here are some groups that provide services to migrant workers:

Telamon Corp.

What it is: Telamon is a nonprofit whose purpose is to improve the lives of migrant farmworkers.

Started in 1965, it has worked in Michigan since 1991. The term telamon usually refers to a support column sculpted in the form of a man.

What it does: Provides employment and training services, language training, early childhood programs and other services.

For more: Go to www.telamon.org
Michigan Migrant

Head Start

What it is: A part of Telamon, Michigan Migrant Head Start serves about 1,500 children up to age 5 in 20 locations statewide. Its centers are open 10 to 12 hours a day at least five days a week.

What it does: The Head Start centers have monthly parent meetings and offer training in CPR and first aid.

To get involved: The program accepts donations of children's books, toys and other items at its 6350 W. Michigan Ave. office. To learn more or to make a donation, call 323-7002.

The Reading People

What it is/does: The Capital Area Literacy Coalition's Migrant Literacy Project used almost 30 volunteers to teach reading, writing and English as a second language to adults and children temporarily living in migrant camps this summer.

To get involved: The program is not accepting new volunteers until spring for this project, when the migrants return for another season of farm work. Call 485-4949 or visit www.thereadingpeople.org.

Alexia.

While her husband and about 100 other migrants work on Buurma Farms, Raul's mother, Guadalupe, watches the children of the other farmworkers during the day. She sees a brighter future for them.

"I don't want my kids being like us," Guadalupe said. "I want them to have better choices than we do."

And they do.

Raul is part of Michigan State University's College Assistance Migrant Program, which provides financial aid and mentoring to migrant students.

The program has nearly doubled its enrollment in recent years, and will support 71 students this fall.

Rudy Ramos, associate director of MSU CAMP, said the students have a strong commitment to their culture and family.

"We see ourselves as a family away from our families," Ramos said about the students. "You can feel their willingness to help younger students."

Guadalupe said she is proud of her children and the life she and her husband worked to provide.

"My kids, they don't ask me for anything," Guadalupe said. "They work for their own things, but I still have payments and I still have a little girl that I have to work for. And we like it - you really get used to going back and forth."

On a recent day, workers wiped the sweat pouring from their foreheads with bandanas and shirt sleeves as they picked curly mustard plants in the afternoon sun on Buurma Farms. The 12-hour workday starts at 7 a.m.

As a child, Raul said he didn't understand why he needed to work. By 14, he said he understood that he was just pulling his own weight.

The migrant lifestyle - which meant switching schools three to four times each year - was never

CAMP

What it is: The Michigan State University College Assistance Migrant Program is an educational program funded by the U.S. Department of Education. It's one of 43 such programs at campuses across the country.

What it does: MSU CAMP is designed to support migrant and seasonal farmworkers with financial assistance and mentoring. Students in the program must participate in an alternative spring-break trip and do community service.

For more: www.msucamp.msu.edu

High School Equivalency Program

What it is: This MSU program helps immigrant students obtain a General Educational Development certificate.

What it does: It provides GED instruction in English and Spanish and individualized tutoring, along with life skills training and cultural awareness courses.

For more: www.msuhep.msu.edu

Cristo Rey Migrant Health Clinic

What it is: The program is a seasonal service that offers a Mobile Health Clinic for migrant farmworkers in mid-Michigan.

What it does: Volunteer doctors, nurses and MSU interns visit migrant camps in July and August. The clinic is provided by the Ingham County Health Department. Director John Ray Castillo said for many of the migrants, it is the only time they see a doctor all year.

For more: www.cristo-rey.com

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easy.

"It's hard," he said, "because you start to get attached to people but you know you have to say goodbye."

Raul said school was difficult because curriculums in Fowlerville and Texas varied, and he had to take some classes more than once.

Most of his teachers and counselors suggested he join the Army instead of applying to college.

"They already assume that you're going to be a lifer on the farm," he said.

Raul's summer internship ended a couple of weeks before fall classes started. Instead of taking the time to relax, he returned to Buurma farm to work.

"I still like working there," he said.

The job, Raul explained, has taught him to be responsible with money.

"When you work 70 hours a week and earn a small paycheck, you learn not to waste money," he said.

That's important in a line of work that still demands a lot but pays little.

In 2001, the average income for a migrant family of four was \$7,500, according to state data.

Raul said he hopes that after graduating, he can earn enough to help his family.

"They just need a little help to stay above water," Raul said. "They're not going to stop working, I know that."

The toughness in his tone fades when he talks about his 4-year-old sister. Raul doesn't want her to have to set foot in the fields.

"I want to take her to Disney World," he said.

The migrant life

Guadalupe Saucedo said life on the farm is hard work, but she enjoys it.

"It's been a good experience because you work with a lot of different people, characters and everything," Saucedo said. "And the thing that I like is all these years we've only worked with two farmers. They are wonderful, wonderful people."

Most migrant families working in Michigan arrive in the spring and leave after the fall harvest.

Farmers usually provide housing near the fields and have to meet basic health and safety standards to obtain a license for the camp from the state.

Some farmworkers are paid hourly; others earn their pay based on how much they pick.

The days start early in the morning to avoid midday heat. Many migrants work 12-hour days six or seven days a week, especially during peak harvest times.

The Occupational Safety and Health Administration sets 14 as the minimum age for work permits in most jobs. But special regulations apply to children working on farms; children younger than 14 can work with a parent's consent and earn their own paycheck.

Pat Raymond, director of Michigan Migrant Head Start, said her goal is to make sure young children are not in the fields, whether they are there working or because their parents cannot find or afford day care.

Brothers reach out

ST. JOHNS — Kids will fight over one action figure, but lots of them can play together with a soccer ball.

Adam Rene Rosenbaum figured that out by the time he was 7. He also noticed many of the migrant children he played with while his parents volunteered at the camps didn't have any toys at all.

So Adam Rene, now 12, collected more than 300 soccer balls by writing letters, making posters and asking people to donate.

"When you see people who have challenges in their life, you get that feeling and know you want to help them," Adam Rene said.

He and his 9-year-old brother, Alex, have donated more than \$40,000 worth of books, toys, school supplies and toothbrushes for migrant children.

Their father, Rene, is a researcher at Michigan State University's Julian Samora Research Institute.

He and the boys read to children at Michigan Migrant Head Start centers.

Alex said when they can find bilingual books, he reads the English and his dad reads the Spanish.

"My father used to be a migrant worker, but he broke out of the cycle with education," Adam Rene said.

They pass on their collected items to Head Start, which distributes them at its child-care centers and farms throughout the state. This year, the program's greatest need was for dental care items such as toothbrushes and toothpaste. The boys have collected \$6,000 in products so far this year.

Contact Tricia Bobeda at 377-1061 or tbobeda@lsj.com.

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FROM OUR READERS: Demand accountability from foster care system

September 2, 2006

The Aug. 29 article about Isaac Lethbridge appalled me ("Workers could have saved boy").

Time and time again, children are removed from home with little to no evidence of abuse or neglect by the Department of Human Services, then ferreted out to private foster care agencies like the Stewart Center that may fit the legal definition of nonprofit organizations but put their bottom lines in state funding in front of the welfare of children.

DHS is able to wash its hands of culpability by assigning the responsibility of the welfare of the children they remove to a third party.

There are many children out there served well by DHS intervention, but there are also many who are harmed. One of the things that needs to happen to stop this is to eliminate qualified blanket immunity for foster care workers and child protective services workers. They should know they will be held accountable for doing their job correctly or face the consequences.

Mark Valenti
Lincoln Park

Seek justice

The horrendous, terrible, unbelievable pain and absolute terror that 4-year old Isaac Lethbridge suffered before his death must be avenged by the justice system for other children currently abandoned in this foster care mess. Foster care homes are being well paid with state tax dollars to care for these children, not to abuse, torture and kill them. We state taxpayers must demand more accountability.

Eric Heckmann
Detroit



The Wayne County Medical Examiner ruled that 2-year-old Isaac Lethbridge died of a beating. Isaac stopped breathing in a foster home in Detroit and died at Children's Hospital of Michigan Aug. 16. (Family photo)

Questions for the parents

The state should be doing much more than questioning the role of the Lula Belle Stewart Center in the death of Isaac Lethbridge. There are many other questions that go to the root of this problem.

Isaac's parents had already lost custody of six older siblings before he and his two youngest sisters were born, so why weren't these kids placed for adoption at birth? Why were his parents allowed to attempt raising more children when they couldn't take care of the ones they already had? Did they receive mandatory birth control counseling? Why were they allowed to have more children?

Linda Kingston

Farmington Hills

Dollar signs

Another innocent child abused and killed because of parental neglect. The Lethbridges had six children removed from their care because of parental neglect and went on to have three more who ended up in foster care. All that these children asked for were love and protection, and their parents let them down.

The Lethbridges left court in tears and immediately hired a law firm to sue. They didn't care about these children until they saw dollar signs. Shame on any judge or jury that awards these people one penny. Geoffrey Fieger should be ashamed to take a case like this. Where are his ethics and moral character, or did he see dollar signs also?

Jo Bucciarelli

Dearborn Heights

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When help's needed, they call on the army for salvation

Published Monday, September 4, 2006 4:04:36 PM Central Time

By ERIC HJERSTEDT SHARP

Globe Staff Writer

HURLEY -- A man on foot, apparently disoriented, was stopped by a Hurley police officer Tuesday to see if he needed help.

From Georgia and hearing-impaired, the man was trying to get to Wausau, but lacked funds, and really didn't know how to get to the Wisconsin city south on U.S. 51.

Seeing the man needed help, the officer referred him to Patti Polkinghorne of the Iron County Department of Human Services, who made sure he received a Salvation Army voucher for a night's stay at the Bear's Den Motel. There, he would be safe and sound and have a night's rest before continuing to Wausau, now that he had been given the right directions.

The Salvation Army Christmas Kettle fund drive provides vouchers to agencies and government human services departments in both Gogebic and Iron

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County. Around the area, law enforcement officers and other officials depend on the organization to provide needed services for people who otherwise might slip through the cracks of traditional agency assistance.

A somewhat unusual story, but all in a day's work for the local Salvation Army, which covers Iron and Gogebic counties and beyond.

Most people associate the Salvation Army with the snowy holiday season between Thanksgiving and Christmas, when the organization's volunteers ring their bells and collect donations from generous shoppers outside Kmart in Ironwood.

However, the Salvation Army's mission reaches beyond just its fundraising period to the rest of the year, when funds raised in the winter sustain those in need. Whether attacking poverty here at home or in aiding in recovery at disaster areas such as New Orleans, the Salvation Army stands ready to assist those in need.

Its mission: "to preach the gospel of Jesus Christ and to meet human needs in His name without discrimination."

The recent incident outside of Hurley illustrates how the non-profit's mission is extended to not only locals' needs, but to those outsiders -- such as the example above -- who may need help where otherwise no help may come.

Throughout the Gogebic Range, hundreds of volunteers ring bells and take turns standing vigil next to the familiar Christmas kettle each season. Last year's record total collected -- \$22,000, according to Salvation Army

chair Jamie Stiffarm -- also provides funds for area food pantries, shelter for the homeless, utility shut-offs and relief from the devastation caused by floods, fire and other disasters.

"People around here have been wonderful," Stiffarm said. "The community involvement is absolutely a blessing."

Stiffarm credits the success of the area group with the volunteers who come out to ring bells and sew quilts, and a volunteer board that meets every month at the American Legion, attending to business affairs of the non-profit. She praises the work of founders Verna Wesa and the late Fred Roberts, both of Ironwood.

"Most of all, thank you for all area volunteers," Stiffarm said. "For not only caring about the community, but for caring about the Salvation Army, your love and respect are greatly appreciated."

She noted the work by area women's groups "from Ontonagon to Bessemer" who pitched in and created 72 quilts that will be distributed this winter. Stiffarm keeps the quilts (each different) protected until the weather gets colder. Many of them will be distributed at the huge Christmas party held each year by the Salvation Army.

"We always need blankets, hats, mittens and gloves," she said.

Those wishing to volunteer for a slot in front of Kmart between the day after Thanksgiving to Christmas Eve should phone Stiffarm at (715)360-8563. To contribute, send a check to The Salvation Army, Box, 86, Ironwood, MI 49938.

Grand Rapids Press Letters

Tuesday, September 05, 2006

Ford Foundation has helped

Two cheers for The Press editorial concluding that state-imposed quotas on how foundations spend their charitable assets is a bad idea ("Jeopardizing Michigan causes," Aug. 21).

We agree that legislation to force foundations to spend specific amounts in the state would undermine donor intent and discourage new foundations from setting up shop in Michigan. Foundations must have the flexibility to respond to changing needs.

No state should impose quotas on grant-making and no foundations should accept them.

We hold back a third cheer. First, The Press says the foundation has "a meager record of grant giving in the state relative to the Ford family's desires." But since 1995, according to our annual reports, we've provided more than \$40 million to organizations in the state.

The Press also suggests our grants fail to live up to the ambitious standard set by our founder, Edsel Ford. In fact, Edsel gave the foundation a broad charter "to administer funds for scientific, educational and charitable purposes, all for the public welfare."

Whether in funding the fight against oppression in Eastern Europe, affordable home ownership for all Americans, the civil rights movement or the creation of Sesame Street, the Ford Foundation has helped hundreds of millions of people around the world live freer, better, more prosperous lives.

Edsel Ford would take great pride in having made that possible.

ALFRED IRONSIDE

Director of Communications

Ford Foundation

New York

Monroe Evening News, The (MI)

September 1, 2006

School supplies for needy (EDIT)

Back-to-**school** shopping is a pleasure **for** many folks, but not so much **for** those in the lower-income echelons.

The cost of **school supplies** is going up each year. The average cost to Midwest families is now put at \$87.

So it's good to see that the Salvation Army and the Monroe office of the state Department of Human Services banding together to get free **school supplies** to the **needy**.

Recently the two agencies handed out hundreds of backpacks filled with **school supplies**.

Similar efforts have been going on **for** years, but this is the first time those two groups have blended their programs. The idea is to reach more people while avoiding duplication.

But truly this is a communitywide effort. **Supplies** have been donated by area merchants, churches and other organizations. Local 723, United Auto Workers plants alone gathered five barrels of **school supplies**.

Volunteers have spent many hours filling the backpacks and handing them out.

Cheers to everyone involved.

Forty dollars worth of **school** gear might not sound like much to most of us, but to those scrimping to make ends meet it can be a big help. Multiply that \$40 times 500 or more and you've got a drive that should make the community proud.

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Published September 3, 2006

Area youth step into school with self-confidence

CHARLOTTE — This back-to-school season marks the fourth year that the Eaton Federal Savings Bank has sponsored and promoted the shoe drive, Steppin Up for Kids. The drive supports the back-to-school event held annually at the Eaton Clothing & Furniture Center. This year, nearly 600 Eaton County school-aged youth who qualified were served.

Participation came from caring and generous customers, service clubs, businesses, churches and individuals who strongly supported the project with donations of shoes or money.

"The generosity of this community inspires me and makes me proud to be a part of it," said Carol Monroe, Eaton Clothing & Furniture Center president.

During the Back-to-School distributions days, school-aged youth qualifying for assistance at Eaton Clothing & Furniture Center, in addition to shoes, received school supplies, three pairs of socks, three pairs of underwear, soap, shampoo and other personal care items.

The Eaton Clothing & Furniture Center provides at no cost, good, clean, gently used clothing and furniture to those who qualify from community donations. The store is also a thrift shop open to the general public. The center is a United Way Agency that has a volunteer staff through the Volunteer Services program at the Eaton County Department of Human Services.

For more information, call (517) 543-4334 or stop by the Center, 116 E. Lovett St., Charlotte. Store hours are Monday-Friday, 9 a.m. to 3:30 p.m. and Saturday, 10 a.m. to 1 p.m.

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Published September 2, 2006

Critics call Michigan's faith-based office short on works

Director says 2 groups aided since March '05

By Tom Lambert
Lansing State Journal

The city of Lansing may not find much direction if it tries to model its new faith-based initiatives office after the state's program.

The leader of the state office, Greg Roberts, recalled two examples of his program helping others - assisting a Detroit group to secure a grant and setting up a meeting between ministers and state officials in Macomb County.

Officials in the governor's office later defended Roberts as doing a lot more, but critics say it appears taxpayers have received little for the nearly \$150,000 the office costs each year.

Gov. Jennifer Granholm created the statewide office of community and faith-based initiatives in March 2005 to help religious and social service agencies get more federal grants.

Last month, Lansing Mayor Virg Bernero created a similar faith-based office here that will seek state and federal grants to help fund local services. The city has said it will follow the state's example.

Roberts, a Detroit minister, was tapped by Granholm to head the office in January 2003, two years before it was officially opened. He said his role has mainly been as a "conduit and facilitator."

"As we move into the next year, we will go after more federal funding for this office, as well as other organizations in the state," Roberts said.

Across the nation

- The White House Office of Faith-Based and Community Initiatives works with 33 states, including Michigan, assisting them in addressing critical needs in their communities. There are about 115 mayor's offices around the country that also have an office or liaison for faith-based and community organizations.

Source: White House

On the Web

- For more information, go to www.whitehouse.gov/government/fbci/index.html.
- For more information on the statewide effort, go to www.michigan.gov/outreach.
- To become a volunteer for Lansing's faith-based office, call Mayor Virg Bernero's office at 483-4141.

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Aid in obtaining grant

Roberts said his office helped one organization - Wings of Faith - obtain a \$75,000 federal grant for a prisoner re-entry program in Detroit. Wings of Faith officials didn't return calls.

Roberts said he also helped residents in a Mount Clemens neighborhood with their concerns about parolees moving into their area. He said he did that by "facilitating" a meeting between the head of a local ministerial alliance and state officials.

The current budget for the state's office is \$147,165 annually, which covers Roberts' \$95,500 salary, Granholm spokeswoman Liz Boyd said.

Part of the budget is for travel, office expenses and benefits, she said.

Boyd said Roberts also served as a liaison between the governor and Benton Harbor officials following race riots that erupted there in June 2003.

"Greg is continually meeting with the ministerial alliance to really uplift that community," Boyd said.

She added he also is involved in prisoner re-entry programs in places including Ingham, Eaton and Clinton counties.

"I can tell you he plays an integral part in this administration," Boyd said. "He has been a huge resource as adviser on important issues for the governor."

Roberts is also working on a new initiative to make home and auto insurance more affordable for good drivers in urban areas, Boyd said.

But officials from a state think tank and national watchdog group said it doesn't appear the current setup of the office is the best use of taxpayers' dollars.

"I am not surprised that money is spent with little effort to record precisely where it goes and what impact it has," said Michael LaFaive, director of fiscal policy for the Mackinac Center for Public Policy, a Midland-based conservative think tank. "Government is so big and fat with money that too many programs and agencies waste resources without apology or cause."

Audit suggested

LaFaive suggested the state do an audit on the office.

"They should ask the program director to show records of things that can be objectionably measured," he said. "At the very least, determine if sufficient records have been kept."

David Williams, vice president of policy for the Washington, D.C.-based Citizens against Government Waste, said it seemed taxpayers were spending a lot of money for an office "with scant example of success."

"The state needs to clamp down and do a better oversight," Williams said. "The end result of this, like it usually is, will probably be somebody shrugging their shoulders and nothing is done."

Roberts said criticism of his office is unfair because obtaining federal money has been "very competitive" on the national scene and the office is starting to build momentum.

President Bush has pushed the movement to allow faith-based community groups around the country better compete for federal dollars.

Roberts said the early appointment allowed him to spend two years getting to know religious leaders around the state, including Bishop David Maxwell, who is overseeing Lansing's new faith-based office.

When asked what agencies or people his office has helped in mid-Michigan, Roberts responded: "I am not sure who we've helped outside of the faith-based leaders."

City budgets \$30,000

Lansing's faith-based office will have an annual budget of \$20,000 to \$30,000 - which will mostly cover Maxwell's salary - Mayor Virg Bernero has said.

Maxwell said the office is needed, pointing to recent Census figures that show 24.4 percent of Lansing is in poverty.

"There are a lot of people struggling out there and we are going to do our best to help them out," he said.

He said his office won't deal directly with the public, just the agencies that help citizens.

The city will assist them in obtaining federal funding for specific programs.

The office may tackle such issues as teen pregnancy, mentoring programs, crisis intervention for families and finding employment.

Contact Tom Lambert at 377-1063 or tlambert@lsj.com.

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Here lie the forgotten

Years ago, the poor, nameless were buried in Pontiac

BY KATHLEEN GRAY

FREE PRESS STAFF WRITER

September 5, 2006

Usually, it's just a name. Sometimes only a last name that appears on the 3-by-5-inch index card marking the end of a person's life.

The ledger with 1,187 names, including dozens of unknowns, often is the only clue of the identity of the people buried at the Oakland County Cemetery, also known as the county's potter's field.



Most graves are assigned only a number.

"If you ended up there, you had fallen on some pretty hard times," said Michael Hughson, a property specialist with Oakland County's Department of Facilities Management, which maintains the 140-year-old cemetery in Pontiac.

Some experienced harder time than others.

A 2 1/2 -year-old boy was listed as the possible murder victim of his stepfather. A man was hit and killed by a bus in 1944. A newborn boy was found in an incinerator, put there by his mother.

And the language of the time at the cemetery is evident. Black people were referred to as coloreds, and babies born to single mothers were listed as illegitimate.

Many died while staying at either the Oakland County Infirmary -- a county-owned hospital for poor people -- or the State Mental Hospital, which later became known as Clinton Valley Center in Pontiac.

Oakland County's superintendent of the poor was the overseer of the graveyard for indigent and unknown people when the 2.3-acre parcel was bought by the county in 1866.

Perched on a plot at the end of a dusty dirt road, the cemetery is marked by white

pillars and an arching wrought iron gate. Dotted with soaring spruce trees, there is little to reveal the purpose of the land.

About a half-dozen headstones on the property are set in the ground. A headstone with a copper vase marks the grave of 2-week-old Shane Marline Trombley, who died in 1963. A yellow-and-white wreath bearing a satin ribbon with "Dad" written in gold threads is placed at the grave of Lewis Beach, who also died in 1963. They are the only signs that the tranquil and well-groomed parcel is a final resting place.

Even though the county stopped accepting bodies for burial at the cemetery in 1972, it still maintains the plot, keeping the grass well cut and bushes trimmed.

The white pillars that mark the entrance were recently painted, and the small concrete stones, each bearing a number from 1 to 1,162 that mark the grave sites, were recently uncovered. Some of the graves contain more than one body.

There will be no more burials at the Oakland County Cemetery. With a capacity of 1,326 grave sites, the cemetery is almost full and the county can't be sure of the exact locations of each gravesite.

Now, the state Department of Human Services, with the help of funeral homes and cemeteries, takes care of burials or cremations for people who cannot pay for a funeral.

"We've always done a pretty good job taking care of it," said Hughson, who added that there's no thought of the county selling the property. "There's not much of a market out there for cemeteries."

It's more a matter of love and obligation, he said. And every once in a while, maybe once or twice a year, the county gets a call from someone looking for a friend or relative who might be buried at the cemetery.

Marilyn Colton, 74, of West Bloomfield spent 20 years looking for her estranged grandfather. In 2001, she found that Royal Victor Jefferson White was buried at the cemetery in 1936. Several members of the family pitched in to have a headstone placed at the cemetery for him.

"I had been to the courthouse several times," she said. "I would bring up potter's field, and no one knew what I was talking about."

Colton was only 4 when her grandfather died so she has vague memories of him.

"My family was estranged from him, and his second wife would not claim his body," she said. "This was during the Depression years, and my family didn't have the means to do anything about it. So he ended up at potter's field."

Colton makes one or two trips a year to the Oakland County Cemetery. Sometimes the gates are locked, but she can still see her grandfather's headstone from the entrance.

"It's really lovely and very quiet there," she said. "At least someone is caring for it. It looks as good as most cemeteries."

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Poverty reaching more people in Oakland County

Downsizing, layoffs increase need for help

BY GINA DAMRON

FREE PRESS STAFF WRITER

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The face of poverty in Oakland County is changing.

Impoverished citizens, according to county service agencies, are more than homeless people and single moms working two jobs to get by. They now include laid-off business professionals and factory workers.

Communities throughout the county have seen increases in the number of residents living below the poverty line, including Troy, Rochester Hills, Waterford and Southfield, according to 2005 census figures released on Tuesday. The U.S. Census Bureau considers a family of four living on less than \$20,000 a year, for example, as being impoverished.

With the state's economy in a downturn and major companies and the automotive industry cutting back their workforces, more and more people could end up needing help with utility bills or making the month's rent, said Susan Vidican, executive director of the Rochester Area Neighborhood House, which provides emergency services to Oakland County residents. Last week, she said, a nurse, lawyer and substitute teacher came by, looking for financial assistance.

The South Oakland Shelter in Royal Oak -- a program that requires its clients to have a job -- gets up to 25 calls a day from local residents who are homeless because they've lost their jobs and were evicted from their homes, said Susan Wichmann, office manager for the shelter.

In Troy, the increase in impoverished residents -- from 2,220



Clarence Byrd, 37, works Friday at the security desk at the Grace Centers of Hope in Pontiac. After losing his job and falling into poverty a year ago, Byrd sought help from the Christian service organization. Census figures have shown an increase in poverty in Oakland County. (LINDA RADIN/Special to the Free Press)

Where to find help

There are many service agencies that can assist Oakland County residents who are in financial straits. Here are two:

- **Troy People Concerned**, which primarily helps Troy residents, can be reached at 248-589-9199, 24 hours a day. Or, go to

in 2000 to 4,458 in 2005 -- can be attributed to problems at Delphi Corp., which filed for bankruptcy in October, and Kmart's headquarters leaving the city for Chicago last year, according to officials from Troy People Concerned, nonprofit group and referral agency that assists residents in financial straits.

www.tpchelps.org.

Doris Nelson, administrative assistant for the group, said that Troy People Concerned received 410 calls for service in August. That's at least double the number of calls the group was receiving each month five years ago, she said.

• Rochester Area Neighborhood Home, for Rochester area residents, can be reached at 248-651-5836 Or go to www.ranh.org.

The group gives away about \$20,000 a year, but has to refer most people to other agencies for assistance because they can't accommodate everyone.

"They're trying very hard to make it," Nelson said. "It's heartbreaking to talk to some people. They're trying desperately to hang on."

That was Clarence Byrd a year ago.

The 37-year-old Pontiac resident -- who was making \$380 a week as a dishwasher and cook at a local Holiday Inn -- struggled with paying bills. He turned to marijuana, cocaine and alcohol. Soon, his wife left, he lost his job and he ended up on the streets with nothing but his addictions.

Now rehabilitated and with a new lease on life and his faith, Byrd is in his sixth month of living at Grace Centers of Hope, a Christian-based service organization in Pontiac. Though he's getting the help he needs, Byrd still has no money and can't look for a job until he's in his 10th month of the program. He said it's hard sometime when he doesn't even have enough money to go buy a candy bar.

Stories like Byrd's are playing out throughout the county -- in communities like Waterford, where nearly 6,000 out of more than 72,000 residents, about 8% of the population, in 2005 were impoverished; and in Rochester Hills, where nearly 3,300 of about 70,000 residents, about 5% of the population, were living in poverty.

Katherine Graham, a market research analyst with Oakland County's Planning and Economic Development, said the manufacturing industry is dissipating, as high-tech industries -- such as financial services and research and development -- are growing. That is forcing many unskilled labor workers into low-wage jobs or no jobs at all.

"People ... used to work in the plant making \$28 an hour," Graham said, "and now they're working at Murray's Auto Parts and they're making \$12" an hour.

Graham said that there are job-training programs intended to assess the abilities of unskilled workers and train them to work in other industries.

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— THE — ANN ARBOR NEWS

Mailbox holds gift for kids: A free book every month

Friday, September 01, 2006

News Staff Reporter

Younger siblings no longer need to feel left out when their older brothers and sisters come home from school with new books.

They can get their own free storybooks in the mail every month in a program offered through Great Start Livingston. The local group is the seventh Michigan participant in Imagination Library, a national literacy program created 10 years ago by country music singer Dolly Parton.

"Research tells us that one of the best ways parents can help children get ready for school is to read to them regularly," said Emily Ladd, Great Start Livingston coordinator. "We hope that putting a book in their hands every month will give them more incentive to sit and read together, turn the pages, look at the pictures and cuddle."

Imagination Library is open to all county children from birth to 5 years old. Participating families receive one free book per month, so children signed up when they're born will get a free library of 60 hardcover books before they start school. The first book is "The Little Engine That Could." The last book is "Look Out Kindergarten, Here I Come!"

The best part to parent Nicole Mather of Handy Township is that the books will arrive in the mail in the child's own name.

"There's nothing better to them than getting a piece of mail," she said. "They're really going to like that, and they will love the books."

Mather signed up her children, Jerzey, 4, and Jexi, 3, at Imagination Library's Aug. 22 kick-off at the Howell Area Historical Society Depot Museum. She reads regularly to all three of her children and takes them to the Howell Carnegie District Library's story programs. It made a difference when the oldest, Janiah, 6, started school, she said.

"She's loved language and books since she was tiny," Mather said. "I started reading to her even before she could understand the words and she went to kindergarten reading."

Stories can be shared by so much more than words, Ladd said.

"It's important for them to hear language and to learn how to open a book, hold it and turn the pages even when they are very young," she said. "Then you can share pictures and then talk with them about rhyming and what's in the pictures and the stories."

Imagination Library books cost \$27 per year per child and Great Start Livingston, a collaborative effort of parents, non-profit organizations, businesses and community leaders, has designated \$18,000 to buy enough for 660 of Livingston County's 12,000 preschool-age children, Ladd said. It is working with Head Start, Michigan School Readiness Program, Department of Human Services, LACASA and other groups to initially sign up children with at-risk factors.

Starting Jan. 1, the program will be available to all preschoolers regardless of family income, and an additional \$12,000 will be needed to cover these costs, Ladd said. Fund-raising, grants and donations are needed, she said.

Parton started Imagination Library in her home of Sevier, Tenn. It's now in 566 communities throughout the country. Other Michigan participants are Bay, Arenac, Eaton and Allegan counties, Gull Lake, Midland and Hannahville Indian School.

"I was in a book club as a kid and I have loved reading since," Ladd said. "I hope we can give that same experience to many children here."

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Midland Daily News

Monday readers' views

09/04/2006

Rally is Thursday

To the editor:

The week of Sept. 25 through Oct. 1, 2006 has been proclaimed as Equal Parents' Week in the state of Michigan. On Wednesday, Sept. 27, from noon to 2 p.m., on the east steps of the State Capitol in Lansing, a public rally will be held in honor of this week, and in support of House Bill 5267, The Equal Parenting Bill.

The Equal Parents Week Rally has been organized to bring to the attention of our legislature, our executive branch, our judiciary and the general public that Equal Parenting is a civil rights issue whose time has come.

The Equal Parenting Bill, House Bill 5267, would result in a presumption of joint custody for divorcing parents provided that both are fit, willing and able to care for their children, and would mean equal access for children to both their mother and father.

Michigan's family law court system shows neither respect nor compassion for families destroyed by divorce. A marriage is ended by a divorce, not a parent's responsibility to his or her children. Our children are entitled to the love, care, guidance and support of both mom and dad, whether they are married, separated or divorced. The family law court system sees fit to decide otherwise.

Rally speakers will include nationally-known family advocates, legislators, VIPs, community leaders and parents. Dads and Moms of Michigan (248)559-3237, The Family Rights Coalition of Michigan (248)917-5142, Fathers-4-Justice (614)448-3276, and the Children's Rights Council (248) 376-2102, have teamed together to sponsor this rally. They all invite you to join with us in defense of the traditional American family at this historic rally. Forty percent of American children are growing up in a home without their own father. Help transform Michigan from a wasteland of broken families into a promised land of healthy families and community renewal. Please make plans to attend!

I am a divorced but very proud father of two wonderful daughters.

PHILLIP N. WURM

Hastings